

Human Rights *in British Columbia*

June 2003

RACE DISCRIMINATION and RACISM

What is race discrimination?

Race discrimination is someone bothering, threatening or treating a person unfairly because of that person's race, colour, ancestry or place of origin.

Race discrimination can occur in a number of ways including:

- verbal abuse or threats
- unwelcome remarks, name-calling
- insulting pictures, drawings or signs
- denial of services
- not hiring or promoting someone
- hate publications or symbols

Some examples of race discrimination:

- An Indo-Canadian man goes to see an apartment after calling the landlord to make sure that it is available to rent. After seeing the man in person, the landlord becomes uncomfortable and says the apartment has now been rented. The next day the man calls the landlord again to inquire about the apartment and learns it is still available.
- A large employer hires many people of colour to work in lower paid jobs. While white employees are trained and promoted, employees of colour are never promoted although they are qualified and experienced.
- An aboriginal woman is told by a store clerk that she can't buy rubbing alcohol from their grocery store because she'll "just go outside and drink it."
- A group circulates a pamphlet that expresses hatred about a particular ethnic community.

What is racism?

Racism has its roots in attitudes and beliefs that some people are superior because they belong to a particular race, ethnic or national group. Racism can exist as part of an individual's beliefs and attitudes, in our collective

social and cultural values and in an institution's practices. Racism causes harm by isolating and hurting people and dividing communities.

What is the difference between race discrimination and racism?

Race discrimination is the expression of racism, often seen in the actions of individuals and in the policies or practices of institutions and can be dealt formally, on an individual, case-by-case, basis. To prevent racism, a broader-based social response is often needed and, because of this, is very complicated to deal with formally.

What protection does the B.C. Human Rights Code provide?

The Human Rights Code protects you from race discrimination in:

- employment (includes hiring, firing, wages or other terms of employment)
- tenancy (renting a place)
- buying a house, condominium, mobile home or other property
- public services and facilities (such as restaurants, government services, hospitals or schools)
- publications (such as newspapers, posters or signs)

Not all types of racism can be dealt with using the Human Rights Code. Sometimes racism can be subtle and difficult to identify making it tough to proceed with a formal complaint under the Code.

What if the discrimination was not intended?

Discriminatory actions do not need to be intentional in order to be prohibited. "It was just a joke" or "I was only teasing" is no excuse under the law. People have the right to work and live in a

discrimination free environment. The first step to protecting this right is to tell the person that the actions are offensive and to ask the person to stop.

What should I do if I am being discriminated against because of my race?

If you are being harassed or discriminated against because of your race:

- Let the person know their behaviour is unacceptable and is making you feel uncomfortable. Tell them to stop it.
- Keep a record of what happened including the date, place, time and description of the incident and the name of person who discriminated against you.
- If discrimination happens at work, in your apartment building or in a restaurant, tell the employer, landlord or manager what happened and ask them to do something about it.
- Use available internal processes to file a complaint at your workplace or school.
- File a grievance with your union.
- File a human rights complaint with the BC Human Rights Tribunal. (Services provided by the tribunal are free. See contact information at the end of this information sheet.)
- If you live in a small town or English is not your first language, taking action to end race discrimination can be more difficult. Try contacting agencies or organizations in your area that may be able to assist you, such as your local aboriginal organization or immigrant-serving agency.

What Can You Do To Stop Racism?

Victims of racism may feel powerless to take action. There are a number of things you can do. People who express racist beliefs or attitudes must be made aware that such ways of thinking are unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

Recognize and take action against racism in yourself, your community, your school, your workplace or your neighbourhood.

- If you feel safe and comfortable, talk to the person who is expressing racist attitudes or beliefs. Tell them to consider their behaviour and the impact it has on others. Ask them to stop.

- If you do not feel safe, talk to or get assistance to deal with the racism from someone you trust (e.g. work colleague or school counsellor).
- Offer your support to people who are being discriminated against.
- Check to see if your workplace or school has a human rights policy to deal with behaviours that stem from racism. If they don't, ask that a policy be developed.
- Racist bullying at school can be hurtful. Tell the bully to stop or let a teacher or counsellor know of the bully's behaviour.

Contact information

Further information on human rights are available from both the Human Rights Tribunal and the Ministry of Attorney General. Contact their offices or visit the Web sites using the information below:

Human Rights Tribunal

Suite 1170 - 605 Robson Street
Vancouver BC V6B 5J3
Phone: 604 775-2000
Toll Free (in B.C.): 1-888-440-8844
TTY (for hearing impaired): 604 775-2021
FAX: 604 775-2020
E-mail: bchumanrightstribunal@gems9.gov.bc.ca
Web: www.bchrt.gov.bc.ca

Ministry of Attorney General

10th Floor 1001 Douglas Street
PO Box 9286 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9J7
Phone: 250 356-9596
Fax: 250 356-7136
TTY (for hearing impaired), call through
Enquiry BC: 1-800-661-8773
Web: www.ag.gov.bc.ca/programs/hrc/index.htm